

Food and Justice:

POLICY INITIATIVES FOR COMMUNITY FOOD SECURITY IN CALIFORNIA

INTRODUCTION

In California's food system, appearances are deceiving. Despite being the produce basket for the country, many family farmers are going out of business and others are seeing their farms being paved over by relentless sprawl. Despite the enormous wealth of many of our residents, there remains entrenched poverty and hunger in rural and urban areas. Despite Californians' reputation for health consciousness, there is a growing epidemic of childhood obesity and diabetes. Despite the incredible diversity of foods available throughout the year, many urban communities remain without supermarkets, and Californians are increasingly concerned about the safety of the food they feed their families.

These issues are complex and systemic in nature, and require a public policy response that is equally systemic in nature. Support for public and private efforts to reduce hunger, prevent diet-related disease, and support family farmers cannot be achieved without changes in public policy. The California Food and Justice Coalition has formulated a series of policy recommendations that comprise the beginning steps to strengthening community food security in the state, especially for the most vulnerable—seniors, mothers, and children. The recommendations described in this "Food and Justice" policy platform are wide-reaching in scope, yet achievable in the context of the state's political and economic climate. This platform suggests structures for improved state leadership and coordination on food security issues and provides three sets of public policy recommendations to:

- Secure access to healthy foods;
- Support community-based food security projects; and
- Strengthen public health and local agriculture through farm-to-school programs.

These policy areas emerged from two years of analysis and dialogue, participated in by more than 120 food, farm, health, and justice organizations and capped by a two-day summit that founded the California Food and Justice Coalition.

CORE PRINCIPLES OF COMMUNITY FOOD SECURITY

Community food security is a comprehensive framework for developing strategies to address many of the ills affecting our society and environment due to an unsustainable and unjust food system. Following are six basic principles of community food security:

- 1 Focus on meeting the food needs of low income communities, reducing hunger, and improving individual health.
- 2 Address a broad range of food-related problems affecting health, agriculture, community development, and the environment.
- 3 View a stable local agricultural base as key to a community-responsive food system.
- 4 Build up communities' food resources and assets to meet their own needs.
- 5 Emphasize the need to build individuals' abilities to provide for their own food needs.
- 6 Create "inter-disciplinary" projects that cross boundaries and incorporate collaborations with multiple agencies.

WHAT IS THE CALIFORNIA FOOD AND JUSTICE COALITION?

The California Food and Justice Coalition (CFJC) is a statewide membership coalition committed to the basic human right to healthy food while advancing social, agricultural, and environmental justice.

We:

- Envision a California food system in which all activities, from farm to table, are equitable, healthful, sustainable, and community-driven.
- Collaborate with community-based efforts in California to create a socially just, ecologically and economically sustainable food supply.
- Work as partners of the national and international movements for community food security.

Founding Members of the CFJC Steering Committee:

*Berkeley Food Policy Council
California Nutrition Network
Californians for Pesticide Reform
California Sustainable Agriculture
Working Group
Center for Food and Justice
Community Alliance with Family Farmers
Environmental Science Institute
Foundation for Global Community
Health Education Council
New Panther Vanguard Movement
Occidental Arts and Ecology Center
San Francisco Food Systems Council*

POLICY CONTEXT: COORDINATION OF STATE ACTION ON FOOD SECURITY

Recommendation A: Establish a California Food Policy Council

Despite its importance as a basic human need on par with water, housing, and transportation, no American state has a department of food security. Instead, policies and programs affecting food and agriculture are embedded within virtually every agency. To address this oversight, various North American cities, counties, and states have created food policy councils. These councils draw upon the expertise of public and private stakeholders such as supermarket executives, emergency food providers, farmers, public health experts, and community based organizations, to play a coordinating role for food policy within a state, county, or municipal jurisdiction. Through their advisory capacity to the legislature or executive branch, councils can make recommendations that provide for a more coordinated use of state resources toward a common goal of promoting community food security. They also can help to increase the visibility of issues in food and agriculture among the media and policymakers by dint of their official status. A California Food Policy Council could develop innovative food policy recommendations and help the State's multiple agencies with food-related programs and policies coordinate actions to advance food security.

Estimated cost: \$500,000 for administration.

Recommendation B: Form Legislative Caucus on Food Issues

In recent years many California Assemblypersons and State Senators have proposed or supported bills to improve aspects of California's food systems. These legislators—and the State—could benefit from a forum where they share ideas and discuss priorities for legislative initiatives around food issues. Like-minded members of the legislature (from both chambers and all parties) should form a Food Caucus or some similar food policy grouping to advance and coordinate work on food issues.

Estimated cost: Minimal resources needed for administration.

PROPOSAL #1: ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOODS

Healthy foods, such as fruits and vegetables, are key to the prevention of such diseases as diabetes and obesity, which are found in higher than average rates among California's low income population. The lack of access to these foods, as is common among low-income communities throughout the state, can create an additional barrier to leading a healthy life. Poor food access is due in large measure to the lack of supermarkets in the state's poorer neighborhoods, and the lack of available transportation resources—either private automobile ownership or transit lines designed with food shopping in mind. The following policies develop and strengthen community-based programs that can improve fresh food access while simultaneously supporting in-state markets for California grown products.

Recommendation A: Study of fresh food access throughout California

The state shall promote community food assessments as a means of determining residents' access to fresh food. The state shall provide community-based organizations with information and technical assistance on food assessments and will seek to leverage funding to support assessments in low and moderate-income communities throughout the state. Within one year, the responsible agency shall summarize the findings of existing community food assessments in a report to the Legislature and Governor. This report will focus on such issues as:

- Evaluation of access to food—both in terms of the number and types of places to obtain food (supermarkets, corner stores, food banks, farmers' markets, etc) and the transportation options available to reach those locations.
- Evaluation of the quality, price, and cultural appropriateness of the food available.
- Evaluation of community perceptions/ attitudes/needs around food access.
- Recommendations on strategies to increase access for residents living in limited access areas.

Why a Food Access Study: Food access studies need to be conducted in a more

thorough and systematic fashion to assess the need for further action in this arena. Periodic assessments conducted in urban areas throughout the state have discovered disparities in residents' ability to access fresh healthy food. A state-wide summary of community food assessments can tie together local information, build a knowledge base of the extent of the problem of inadequate food access, create a baseline of information against which to measure future initiatives, and propose solutions for legislative and community action.

Estimated cost: \$200,000

Recommendation B: Seed Grants for Farmers' Market, Farm Stands, and CSAs.

The state shall provide seed grants and support grants to farmers' markets, farm stands, and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs that reach low and middle-income communities.

Why Market Seed Grants: Certified farmers' markets, farm stands, and CSA programs offer many Californians direct access to healthy fruits and vegetables. However, few of these markets operate in low-income neighborhoods. Because of economic constraints, markets in lower income communities often require a subsidy for start-up costs and for on-going promotion and management. Seed grants to organizations prepared to start farmers' markets, farm stands, and CSAs in these neighborhoods, and support grants to existing markets and programs can help ensure that all Californians can access the fresh, healthy produce.

Estimated Cost: \$1.5 million over three years.

Recommendation C: Increased Funding for Farmers' Market Nutrition Programs

The State shall provide funds to match available federal funds for the WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (WIC FMNP) and the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP) so as to expand the reach of both programs by 50 percent. The State shall also simplify procedures for those farmers' markets and community supported agriculture farms that wish to accept vouchers.

Why Strengthen FMNP at Farmers' Markets: The Farmers' Market Nutrition Programs

are win-win programs, putting money into the pockets of small farmers while providing the state's most vulnerable populations with nutritious produce. In addition, they have been found to be effective as nutrition education programs, as studies have shown an increase in consumption of produce by participants. Despite these important benefits, these programs are woefully underfunded. The WIC FMNP currently provides around 360,000 California recipients with one booklet worth \$10 per eligible participant per year to be used only during the months of May through November. Similarly, the SFMNP currently only provides one coupon booklet worth \$30 per participant per year. Markets located in low-income areas rely on these programs, so their current limitations restrict these markets' sustainability.

Estimated Cost: \$1.8 million

PROPOSAL #2: COMMUNITY-BASED FOOD SECURITY PROJECTS

In a food secure society, all residents have access to affordable, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food at all times. Community-based groups have developed innovative programs and projects that build food security in their neighborhoods and regions. These projects deserve increased public support.

Recommendation A: Policy Statement Supporting Community Food Security

The Governor's Office shall issue a policy statement expressing California's commitment to Community Food Security. Key points in the State's commitment shall include:

- Support for access to fresh foods for all persons and culturally appropriate nutrition education;
- Support for local and sustainable food production, linkages between small farmers and consumers, and urban agriculture;
- Recognition of food security as an economic development and social justice issue.

Why State Commitment to Community Food Security: Community food security is

an internationally recognized concept. A State commitment to community food security will encourage California agencies and policymakers to take a comprehensive, community-based approach to food and nutrition issues.

Estimated Cost: None

Recommendation B: Increased Funding for California Nutrition Network's Community Food Security and Nutrition Education Grants

The State shall assist the California Nutrition Network's Community Food Security and Nutrition Education grant program in expanding grants by at least 25 percent over current levels. The additional funds can come from a combination of state money, federal funds leveraged through state outlays, and private funds that the state assists the Nutrition Network in raising.

Why Food Security Grants: The California Nutrition Network funds a variety of community-based projects that advance food security through such strategies as creating community gardens, developing connections between school food service and local farmers, needs assessments, and promoting participation in federal food assistance programs. It is among the few sources of funding for such a comprehensive range of approaches to food security in the state. Dedicated state funding will allow the Network to support more projects than the ten to fifteen it is currently able to assist.

Estimated Cost: \$175,000

PROPOSAL #3: HEALTHY FARMS, HEALTHY STUDENTS

In and out of California, a growing movement has emerged to improve the quality of school meals by sourcing foods from local farmers. These win-win programs have also had the additional benefits of increasing income for family farmers, while educating students about farming and the source of their food. Numerous administrative and financial barriers exist to making these farm-to-school connections however. Given the potential of these programs for health promotion and economic develop-

ment, the state should take a larger role in removing these barriers and creating incentives. Public K-12 schools and colleges should be encouraged to serve fresh, locally produced foods that are certified organic or sustainably produced using least-toxic means wherever possible and grown on family farms for school meal programs. (Throughout these proposals, a family farm is defined as one in which an individual farmer, family, or group of individuals is directly involved in ownership, management, marketing, and day-to-day labor. The

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—California Food and Justice Coalition

term local refers to food produced within 150 miles of a purchasing institution; or, if a given food item is not produced within a 150 mile radius, to food produced within the State of California.)

Recommendation A: Policy Statement Encouraging Schools to Buy from Local Family Farmers

The California Department of Education and the California Department of Food and Agriculture shall issue a policy statement that explicitly encourages school districts to purchase products produced by local, family farmers. CDE should also conduct an audit of its bidding and contracting regulations for schools to determine any barriers or possible avenues for encouragement to schools in buying from local farmers.

<p>Why A Policy Statement: For schools to purchase from local farmers they may need to go outside their typical procurement channels. A joint policy statement from the California Department of Education and the California Department of Food and Agriculture would give the green light to school food service directors to take the steps necessary to buy food from local, family owned farms that is certified organic or is sustainably produced using least-toxic means whenever possible.</p> <p><i>Estimated Cost: none</i></p> <p>Recommendation B: Seed Grants to Develop Farm-to-School Food Projects</p> <p>California shall establish multi-year (three years) seed grants for schools within the state to buy food from local, family farmers that is certified organic or is sustainably produced using least-toxic means whenever possible. US Senate Bill S. 995 provides a model for such a program.</p> <p>Why Seed Grants: Many schools do not have the necessary equipment, facilities, or staffing to prepare and serve unprocessed foods purchased from local farmers. They will need financial assistance for capital expenses, labor, materials, consulting services, and produce. State funds can play an</p>	<p>important role in helping schools overcome existing barriers so they can better meet their students' nutritional needs.</p> <p><i>Estimated Cost: \$4 million over three years.</i></p> <p>Recommendation C: Bonus Reimbursements</p> <p>California shall provide Bonus Reimbursements for school meals made with local ingredients. School districts should receive an additional reimbursement tied to the purchase of foods produced by local, family farmers, that is certified organic or sustainably produced using least-toxic means whenever possible.</p> <p>Why Bonus Reimbursements: Food produced out-of-state or overseas can be less expensive than that grown by local, family farmers. As a result, school food service directors can find locally grown foods that are certified organic or sustainably produced using least-toxic means prohibitive in cost. Many schools would require an additional reimbursement to be able to afford purchasing such products. Although this would be an initial cost born by the State, increasing the reimbursement rates serves a dual purpose. First, the increase will improve the quality of the school food, and as a direct result will increase participation in the National School Lunch Program. Second, once schools estab-</p>	<p>lish connections with local family farms, some of the logistical barriers will be eliminated, lowering the costs associated with procuring locally produced food.</p> <p><i>Estimated Cost: \$4 million per year.</i></p> <p>Recommendation D: Transportation and Logistics Study</p> <p>The California Department of Food and Agriculture shall commission a study to evaluate the opportunities for reducing the logistical barriers for family farmers to sell their products to school food services. The study should identify barriers and identify possible solutions, including incentives for farmers to develop delivery systems to schools.</p> <p>Why Transportation and Logistics Study: One of the primary barriers for farmers to sell to local school food services is getting their produce to the schools. Transportation can be a time consuming and costly endeavor, especially for urban schools not in the immediate vicinity of local farms. Various models have been employed in projects across the country. An analysis of the benefits and constraints of each model would be enormously helpful for new projects in the design process.</p> <p><i>Estimated Cost: \$200,000</i></p>
	<p>For more information or to sign on:</p> <p>California Food and Justice Coalition c/o Community Food Security Coalition</p> <p>PO Box 209 Venice CA 90294</p> <p>phone: 310-822-5410 fax: 310-822-1440</p> <p>heather@foodsecurity.org www.foodsecurity.org</p>	